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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 002841

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, S/CT, SCA/A,  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN  
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76  
TREASURY FOR APARAMESWARAN, ABAUKOL  
STATE PLEASE PASS USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG

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SUBJECT: ASSESSING THE PASHTUN BELT

REF: ISLAMABAD 11430

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) This is a joint Embassy Kabul-Embassy Islamabad-CFC cable.

12. (C) Summary: On June 7, Ambassador Neumann, Ambassador Crocker, CFC Commanding General Eikenberry, and their senior staffs met at Embassy Kabul for the first of a series of planned periodic inter-Embassy meetings prompted by common recognition that developments in the Pashtun Belt pose a common and growing threat to Afghanistan and Pakistan, their respective futures, and US national interests in both countries and regionally. The Embassies and CFC plan a follow-up meeting in September. The Pashtun Belt sits astride the Afghan-Pakistan border, and parts of it are largely beyond the control of either government; these areas provide sanctuary and abundant recruiting potential that has allowed the Taliban to target both countries with growing effectiveness. Our June 7 meeting allowed us to assess the situation in the Pashtun Belt and to reach some tentative conclusions about its strategic implications. We also developed a list of measures that our embassies and CFC could undertake jointly, Pakistan and Afghanistan could adopt bilaterally, and Washington agencies should consider supporting. End Summary.

13. (S) Joint Embassy-CFC Assessment: When OEF swept the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies into Pak-Afghan border areas, much of the surviving leadership found sanctuary on the Pakistan side of the Pashtun Belt, mostly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) but also in Peshawar to the east and Quetta to the south. Over time and in safe havens provided by

the terrain and isolation of the Pashtun Belt, the Taliban have gradually reconstructed their command and control functions and have found plentiful recruitment in an easily co-opted and uneducated tribal population; they have also re-established funding links, including to foreign and narco-money sources. The Taliban's reconstitution has been facilitated by terrain, cross-border tribal bonds, weak governance, the unprecedented but largely ineffectual entry of Pakistan military forces into the area, low levels of investment, and a security environment which complicates efforts to bring needed economic development. The environment on the Afghanistan side of the border is better, given that the GOA has had a four-year head start with the help of the international community, but conditions similar to those in the FATA still prevail in many areas, i.e., inadequate governance and law enforcement capabilities, spotty security protection, and limited government resources for reconstruction and development. This permissive environment has not only allowed the Taliban to grow in strength, but also in ambition. In Afghanistan, while the situation remains militarily manageable, the Taliban once again operate in larger formations. In Pakistan, the Taliban increasingly threaten even nominal government control in some FATA agencies by killing moderate officials, mullahs, government supporters, and Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps troops. Last year, the Pakistan military lost more soldiers in the FATA than did Coalition and Afghan forces combined in Afghanistan. The GOP recently has refocused its military, political and economic development efforts to fight al Qaeda and Pakistani Taliban in the FATA, but this is only one of several major security issues that the GOP faces,

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including a separatist insurgency in Balochistan, and sectarian terrorism in Karachi and other parts of Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Taliban continues to harden its psychological, political, and military opposition to our own goals in both countries, and is operating with growing effectiveness not just in Kandahar, Oruzgan, Zabul and Helmand, but also in North and South Waziristan.

15. (S) Strategic Implications: While failure of the two governments to eliminate safe havens for the Taliban and other anti-coalition militia in the Pashtun Belt threatens the success of the OEF campaign in Afghanistan, Pakistan Army operational coordination with Coalition and Afghan forces has been significant. For example, during the recent CFC-A Operation Mountain Lion, Pakistani blocking maneuvers in the border area prevented insurgents from reaching their traditional sanctuaries and frontier safe havens. However, until Pakistan is successful in disrupting the resident senior Taliban leadership, it will be difficult to defeat the insurgency in Afghanistan. At a minimum, we will need to extend not just our time on the ground in Afghanistan but also our resource expenditures and our expectations for the pace and development of governance. If unchecked, trends in the FATA could challenge Pakistan's long-term stability more broadly, with attendant consequences for U.S. national security. Finally, while Pakistan has been a key partner in the campaign against Al Qaeda and other "foreign fighters" on its territory, the largely ungoverned spaces on its side of the Pashtun Belt pose a potential strategic threat to the United States as they threaten to degenerate into a permissive environment for international terrorism analogous to the Afghan environment that triggered the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent OEF intervention in Afghanistan. Pakistan's leadership is very aware and deeply concerned about this threat, but has so far

exhibited little ability to harness its resources and tactics to meet the challenge of stabilizing the FATA.

¶6. (S) Way Forward: Leaders in both capitals acknowledge that they share a common enemy in the Pashtun Belt and that this threat cannot be addressed through military means alone. Pakistan's new FATA strategy (reftel) recognizes the solution must also include governance and economic development. However, both Pakistan and Afghanistan will require substantial resources to effectively implement this multi-pronged strategy. Given the significant U.S. interests at stake, it would be prudent to review U.S. assistance -- diplomatic, military, and economic -- and consider additional steps we can take to support both countries' respective efforts and coordinate our work on both sides of the border. Both governments acknowledge that an effective approach to the Pashtun Belt will require coordinated action by Pakistan and Afghanistan.

¶7. (S) Working on an embassy-embassy basis, there are several steps we are jointly considering and will refine in our next meeting in September in Islamabad. Among them:

- Where possible, coordinate and link our respective assistance programs in the Pashtun Belt across all USG agencies, particularly, roads but also smaller infrastructure so that there is a better cross-border balance of assistance inside discrete tribal areas.

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- Use USG resources to catalyze contributions from other donors and the two host nations.

- Address asymmetries in size and types of USG assistance for each country.

- Encourage expanded government-government ties, including contacts among respective National Security Advisors, trade officials and legislators.

- Where some third party impetus is needed, consider "tri-lateralizing" fora along lines of the successful Tripartite Military Commission. The two embassies have agreed to explore with the GOP and GOA the possibility of a joint briefing on USG assistance and road building in the border areas which we would offer under the auspices of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Economic Committee (JEC). Other areas of possible trilateral engagement under the JEC include Pak-Afghan trade and economic cooperation, OPIC/TDA programs, ROZs, and measures to attract investment to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

- Other econ/trade possibilities: develop communication links from Pakistan to Afghanistan to reduce international telecom costs; U.S. assistance to boost Pak-Afghan and regional trade, including transit trade, to encourage trade via Pakistan vice Iran; coordinate design of Gwadar Port road and rail links to reduce time/cost of transport to Kabul; and promote energy discussions, including support for non-Iran pipeline options and for the planned Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission line.

- Both embassies agreed to look at expanding the U.S. Geological Service survey of mineral resources, which is being carried out from

Kandahar, to both sides of the border. This would lay the groundwork for joint exploration/development.

- Consider bilateral ties between FATA and neighboring Afghan Provinces at Governor level (Note: given deep sensitivities in both governments, now is not the time to encourage tribal and other unofficial linkages that might be perceived as blurring the legitimacy of the existing border.)
- Increase communication between counter-narcotics officials (with the eventual goal of undertaking joint cross-border operations). DEA could set up frequent meetings between officials of each country's vetted unit (ANF/SIC and NIU), to include helping them develop means of communication. Also, DEA and NAS will set up a meeting in a neutral location, such as Dubai, between the senior CN official from each of the two countries.
- Embassies are encouraging refugee camp closures on schedule as some refugee settlements in Pakistan pose a criminal and terrorist threat.
- Encourage GOA public recognition of the \$250 million in GOP assistance pledged to Afghanistan (of which approximately \$105 million has been spent on roads, railway studies, trucks/buses,

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and health facilities).

- Brief President Karzai on road construction and other development activities we are undertaking on both sides of the border; objective would be to obtain buy-in and stimulate senior-level interest in closer cross-border cooperation.

There is considerable scope for progress here and we will pursue it aggressively; but there are limits to what can be achieved through creativity and energy in the field, beyond which Washington's role will be critical. Clearly there is a need for greater reconstruction and development assistance to facilitate the transformation of the Pashtun Belt and to provide economic prospects for its inhabitants that make Taliban ideology unattractive. Additionally, greater political pressure must be brought to bear on both governments to keep their disputes out of the media and project an image of partnership in pursuit of mutual interests in the Pashtun belt.

18. (S) Conclusion: We must be prepared at the national level to consider how to adapt to changes in the strategic environment here; failure to do so risks meeting goals that are out-dated and no longer sufficient to satisfy national objectives. This ambitious vision requires a significant investment, including resources sufficient to meet emerging threats with a robust response. It projects Afghanistan and Pakistan as reliable and stable partners over the long term and as participants and proponents for greater South-Central Asian economic and security cooperation.

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